

terrible tragedy, and I wish a full and fast recovery to those injured. We will work closely with the Government of Pakistan to ensure those responsible for this terrorist attack face justice.

Remarks Following a Roundtable Discussion on Small Business and an Exchange With Reporters in O'Fallon, Missouri

March 18, 2002

The President. Thank you so very much, Rolf, for your invitation to come. Rolf is a classic example of what makes America unique and strong. He had an idea and a dream. He built his own business. He employs good, hard-working people here in Missouri. He's got a vibrant business.

And I explained to these folks that one of my jobs is to create an environment in which the entrepreneurial spirit flourishes, in which small-business owners are able to keep making a living and keep people employed. I talked about making the death tax repeal* permanent, so that Rolf can pass his assets to a family member, if he so chooses. I talked about some expensing items, some items to make sure the small-business owner has got an incentive to invest more, which means more jobs. Tomorrow I'll be talking about regulatory relief. I'm also talking about ways so that a small-business owner such as Rolf can better afford health care for his employees, so that they're able to work here and, at the same time, enjoy health benefits like those from—large companies enjoy.

We had a good discussion. And it's important to the American people to understand the role of small business in our society. Most new jobs created are created by small businesses. And more people are able to realize the American Dream by starting their own business. And so one of things we've all got to work toward is an environment in which the small business flourishes. Rolf, thank you for letting me come. I want to thank you all for a great discussion. I'll answer a couple of questions.

*White House correction.

Terrorist Attack on Church in Pakistan

Q. Mr. President, do you have any sense of who carried out the attack yesterday in Pakistan at the church, why they did it? Do you think they're trying to undermine Musharraf and his support for the war on terrorism?

The President. Very interesting question. I talked to President Musharraf this morning, first thing. He is very sympathetic, obviously. He was deeply concerned about the American loss of life, and he wanted to share that with me. And I appreciated his phone call. We both talked about the need to continue fighting people that would kill for political reasons. And it goes to show that there is still some—that that part of the world is a dangerous place at times. And the tougher President Musharraf is and the more steadfast the United States is, the stronger we stand against terrorist activity, the more lives we'll ultimately save.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. He doesn't know who it is—excuse me for a minute. He doesn't know who it is yet. And when we find him, we'll bring him to justice.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Sir—thank you. Vice President Cheney is in the Middle East. Should he meet with Chairman Arafat? Would you like to see that happen? And if no, why not?

The President. I talked to the Vice President today, and he's had a very good visit in the Middle East. He is—matter of fact, he was 15 minutes away from going in to see Prime Minister Sharon. He had General Zinni with him. General Zinni is optimistic that we're making some progress in the Middle East.

And the answer to who the Vice President ought to meet with or not meet with depends upon General Zinni's recommendations. He's the man on the ground. He's in charge of trying to foster an environment such that we can get into Tenet and then eventually get into the Mitchell peace plan. Our Government has laid out a pathway to a peaceful resolution of a very difficult set of problems. And Zinni's over there working hard to get us into that process.

Operation Anaconda

Q. Mr. President, Operation Anaconda, we've been told, is successful, and——

The President. Operation?

Q. Operation Anaconda, we're being told, is successful, and it's over. Do you feel the war in Afghanistan—that part of the war is now over?

The President. John, I don't. I feel like we've got a lot more fighting to do in Afghanistan. First of all, we were successful in Operation Anaconda. I want to thank our troops, our brave troops, for fighting in incredibly tough terrain and against difficult circumstances. And the difficult circumstances were not only the terrain, it was the fact that we were fighting against an enemy that refuses to surrender. These are people that are there to die. And we accommodated them.

And it's a—but there are more Al Qaida killers in Afghanistan, perhaps in Pakistan, willing to come back into Afghanistan. The reason—and I know for a fact that they were trying to—in the midst of this battle, in the midst of the United States military and our coalition forces being very successful, they were trying to reinforce. And these are people that are—they were willing to reinforce in the midst of the Shahi-Kot Mountain Range, where they were getting wiped out; they were willing to come back into Afghanistan to continue to try to hurt us. These are killers. They hate America. They hate America's freedom; they hate what America stands for. And they are relentless.

But so are we, and we will be more relentless than they are. That's why I've urged the American people to be patient, and the American people are patient. And that's why I've urged Congress to fund the U.S. military. And I hope Congress does fund the U.S. military to the fullest, because we've got a lot more fighting to do in Afghanistan.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Many Mideast leaders are saying that the U.S. should be focusing more on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and less on Iraq. Can you give a reaction to that?

The President. I appreciate their advice, but we will not allow one of the world's most dangerous leaders to have the world's most dangerous weapons and hold the United

States and our friends and allies hostage. That's just not going to happen. And so I appreciate their advice. But we will continue working with them. We will continue dialog. I have told people that we're a deliberate nation. We'll talk to our friends and allies. But what I said about the axis of evil is what I mean. I can't be any more plain about it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:30 p.m. in a conference room at Albers Manufacturing Co. In his remarks, he referred to Rolf Albers, chairman and chief executive officer, Albers Manufacturing Co.; President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan; Barbara Green, an employee at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, and her daughter Kristen Wormsley, who were killed in the March 17 terrorist attack at the Protestant International Church in Islamabad; U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Gen. Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret.); and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. The President also referred to the Tenet plan, the Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire and security plan of June 13, 2001, negotiated by Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet; and the Mitchell Report, the Report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, issued April 30, 2001. A reporter referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

Remarks to Employees of Albers Manufacturing Company in O'Fallon

March 18, 2002

Thank you all. Gosh, thanks for that warm welcome. It's great to be back in Missouri. And thank you for that hospitality.

I'm so glad that I'm with the Senator today; he is a champion of the small-business person. I look forward to working with him on some good legislation that understands the incredibly important role that the small-business person plays in America. And here it is: On a practical sense, more new jobs are created by small-business people than anybody else.

And I happen to think that the small business—the entrepreneur represents one of the true strengths of our country. I mean, after all, this is a country where if you've got a good idea and you're willing to work hard and you're willing to take a little risk, you